

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended): A method of procuring functionally equivalent components, over a computer network, based on aggregated orders from multiple buyers, comprising ~~the steps of:~~

receiving a plurality of orders to procure components for a plurality of buyers, wherein each order includes identifying information and a volume required for each component in the order;

generating a generic specification for each component and assigning a unique number to each group of functionally equivalent components, wherein for each group of functionally equivalent components there is one unique number and a plurality of supplier generated functional part numbers; and

aggregating all orders for each group of functionally equivalent components having the same unique number wherein suppliers of the aggregated functionally equivalent components submit bids to supply the components to the buyers.

2. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, further comprising ~~the step of~~ storing the generic specification and unique number for each component in a public catalog.

3. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, further comprising ~~the steps of~~ conducting an on-line auction; selecting at least ~~one~~ one winning supplier in accordance with an outcome of the auction; and

storing on-line auction information in a buyer catalog, wherein after the conducting of the auction, ones of the plurality of the buyers use the on-line auction information in the buyer catalog to contract with at least one supplier.

4. (currently amended): The method of claim 3, further comprising ~~the step of~~ entering one or more supplier-generated functional part numbers for each component in the buyer catalog.

5. (currently amended): The method of claim 3, further comprising ~~the step of~~ entering

the unique number for each component in the buyer catalog.

6. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, wherein ~~the step of~~ generating further comprises ~~the steps of~~:

allowing a user to utilize a tool to add and delete columns of buyer and supplier information until supplier-independent information is created; and

automatically calculating, with the tool, the values in a supplier-independent column based on the corresponding values of properties in a plurality of supplier-specific columns.

7. (currently amended): The method of claim 6, wherein ~~the step of~~ generating further comprises ~~the step of~~ creating rows, in the supplier-independent column, that represent product properties for supplier-independent information.

8. (currently amended): The method of claim 6, wherein ~~the step of~~ generating further comprises ~~the step of~~ creating rows, in a plurality of columns, that represent product properties for supplier-specific information.

9. (currently amended): The method of claim 6, wherein ~~the step of~~ generating further comprises ~~the step of~~ choosing information from drop-down menus.

10. (currently amended): The method of claim 7, further comprising ~~the step of~~ using the supplier ~~supplier~~-independent information to generate a request for quotation for an auction to be held with participating suppliers.

11. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, wherein ~~the step of~~ aggregating further comprises ~~the steps of~~:

obtaining requirements for the plurality of buyers;

using a tool to automatically calculate the values in an acceptable aggregate buyer tolerance column based on corresponding buyer-specific properties from the requirements.

12. (currently amended): The method of claim 11, wherein ~~the step of~~ obtaining further comprises ~~the step of~~ using the tool to determine whether proposed supplier-independent information is within an acceptable tolerance for each property.

13. (currently amended): The method of claim 11, wherein ~~the step of~~ obtaining further comprises ~~the step of~~ using the tool to highlight gating factors for indicating those properties which prevent a successful match of functionally equivalent components.

14. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, wherein ~~the step of~~ aggregating further comprises ~~the step of~~ retrieving all components with the same unique number from a database and retrieving information about suppliers of each component with the same unique number.

15. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, further comprising ~~the step of~~ conducting an on-line auction when there is a desired volume of aggregated orders.

16. (currently amended): The method of claim 3, further comprising ~~the step of~~ setting a price from a winning supplier as a new price for the functionally equivalent components in the buyer catalog.

17. (currently amended): The method of claim 3, further comprising ~~the step of~~ using a fulfillment partner to deliver components from an on-line auction to the plurality of buyers.

18. (currently amended): The method of claim 3, further comprising ~~the step of~~ processing invoices from the auction and buffering inventory for the plurality of buyers by a fulfillment partner.

19. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, further comprising ~~the step of~~ creating

functionally equivalent components with identical characteristics corresponding to each of a plurality of properties.

20. (currently amended): The method of claim 1, further comprising ~~the step of~~ creating functionally equivalent components having characteristics within a predefined range for each property.

21. (cancelled)

22. (currently amended): A computer implemented method of procuring functionally equivalent components, comprising ~~the steps of~~:

receiving a plurality of orders to procure components for a plurality of buyers, wherein each order includes identifying information and a volume required for each component in the order;

generating a generic specification for each component and assigning a unique number to each group of functionally equivalent components;

aggregating all orders for each group of functionally equivalent components having the same unique number;

conducting an on-line auction wherein suppliers of the aggregated functionally equivalent components submit bids to supply the components to the buyers during the on-line auction and;

selecting at least one winning supplier in accordance with an outcome of the auction, and storing on-line auction information in a buyer catalog, wherein, after conducting of the auction, ones of the plurality of the buyers use the on-line auction information in the buyer catalog to contract with at least one supplier.

23. (currently amended): [[A]] The method of claim 1, wherein for creating [[a]] the generic specification for [[a]] the set of functionally equivalent components to aggregate a plurality of orders containing at least one functionally equivalent component, thereby

increasing buying power of individual buyers, comprises ~~the method comprising the steps of:~~

choosing a set of parameters deemed relevant to a purchasing decision for the set of functionally equivalent component;

comparing a plurality of acceptable tolerance ranges for each of the parameters;

deciding on a generic acceptable tolerance range based on ~~the step of~~ comparing; and

generating the generic specification for the set of functionally equivalent components, wherein the generic specification includes the generic acceptable tolerance range for each parameter.

24. (currently amended): The method of claim 23, wherein ~~the step of~~ deciding further comprises ~~the step of~~ choosing the narrowest tolerance that still affords a sufficiently broad set of functionally equivalent components.